


GULER PAINTING



M.S. Randhawa
and
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Guler painting is the early phase of Kangra *Kalm*. About the middle of the eighteenth century some Hindu artists trained in Mughal style sought the patronage of the Rajas of Guler in the Kangra Valley. There they developed a style of painting which has a delicacy and a spirituality of feeling. The Guler artists had the colours of the dawn and the rainbow on their palette.



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PREFACE

It is the paintings from Guler, Basohli and Chamba in the Punjab Hill States which are the concern of this book. While Guler and Chamba are now in Himachal Pradesh, Basohli is in Jammu and Kashmir State.

For a long time people were familiar only with Mughal Painting. This was partly due to the fact that Mughal Painting came first to the notice of the British scholars at the close of the nineteenth century and they avidly collected them. Moreover, the Mughal empire, even when it had faded away, had left an aura of grandeur. So any miniature painting on hand-made paper which came to the notice of art collectors was indiscriminately dubbed as Mughal.

It was a Sinhalese scholar, Dr Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, who recognized the Hindu paintings from the Punjab Hills and Rajasthan as a distinct entity in his great work *Rajput Painting* (1916). Coomaraswamy was followed by the Bengali scholar, O. C. Gangoly, who published a portfolio of paintings from the Punjab Hills as well as Rajasthan in his *Masterpieces of Rajput Painting* (1926). In the same year, N. C. Mehta of the Indian Civil Service, who was posted in U.P., published his *Studies in Indian Painting* in which he reproduced some Kangra Paintings of the *Gita Govinda* and *Bihari Sat Sai* which he erroneously ascribed to Garhwal. In 1930, J. C. French, a British member of the I.C.S., posted in Bengal, travelled in the Punjab Himalayas and visited many centres of painting. He published his findings in a delightful travelogue, entitled *Himalayan Art* (1931). He established the role of the tiny state of Guler in the development of a new style of painting.

Then followed a lull of twenty-two years. Again a retired British official of the I.C.S., Dr W. G. Archer, published an important book, viz. *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills* (1952). It was the first attempt to analyse styles and to relate them to centres of painting in the Punjab Hills. Apart from aesthetic appreciation of the paintings, it dealt with their dating and provenance, and also presented a study of the material and social environment in which the painting developed. Archer endorsed the opinion of J. C. French that it was at Guler that a new style of painting developed which later on came to be known as Kangra *kalam*.

While Archer was carrying on his researches in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the first author of this book started his on-the-spot researches on Pahari Painting and visited nearly all the centres of painting in the Punjab Himalayas. He also collected for the Chandigarh Museum whatever paintings had remained with the scions of the aristocratic families, the descendants of the Pahari Rajas, their ministers and priests. As a result he published a series of books on these paintings. His *Kangra Valley Painting* (1954), published by the Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India, was a landmark in research and exploration of this lovely school of painting. Then followed six monographs on *Basohli Painting* (1959), *Kangra Paintings of the Bhagavata Purana* (1960), *Love* (1962), *Kangra Paintings of the Gita Govinda* (1964), *Kangra Paintings of the Bihari Sat Sai* (1966), and the *Kangra Ragamala Paintings* (1971). Apart from publishing masterpieces from the famous series of Pahari Paintings, he also travelled to Basohli and Chamba. There he found paintings painted in a style similar to that of Guler. Further research showed that the paintings at Guler, Basohli and Chamba were the works of a family of artists who belonged to Guler and were descendants of one Seu, carpenter by caste. Later on when Raja Sansar Chand became paramount ruler of the Hill States, some of them migrated to Tira-Sujanpur, where they painted the famous series of paintings of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Sat Sai*, the *Gita Govinda*, the *Ragamala*, and the *Nala Damayanti* romance. It is thus that the style of painting which began at Guler came to be known as Kangra *kalam*.

Guler Painting deserves separate treatment so that its identity is established. Moreover, being the early phase of Kangra *kalam*, it has its own place in art history. Karl Khandalavala, another great scholar of Pahari Painting, gave it the name of pre-Kangra. A more appropriate term would have been proto-Kangra. However, considering the fact that the earliest paintings in this style were painted at Guler, Guler Painting is its more appropriate name. Though no large series, excepting one based on exploits of Durga, were painted at Guler, there are some outstanding portraits, genre scenes, and paintings on the ever-admired theme of *Sringar*. Gur Sahai, a Guler artist, painted a number of paintings on the erotic themes of the *Kama Sutra* in the early nineteenth century.

Another subject which became popular with the Guler artists were the anecdotes from the *Janam Sakhi* of Guru Nanak. This was due to the conquest of the Kangra Valley by the Sikhs. Guler became a tributary state of the Sikh Kingdom of Lahore, and a number of Guler artists migrated to Lahore to enjoy the patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Sikh Sardars.

PREFACE

In this book we present some of the most beautiful Guler Paintings from the collections of Chandigarh Museum, National Museum, New Delhi, and Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. We are particularly indebted to Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, a great scholar and friend of India, for providing colour transparencies of paintings, which he gave as a gift to the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. Most of the paintings are published for the first time. We anticipate that they will provide joy to people who appreciate the beauty of miniature paintings. They will also give recognition to the role of Guler in fostering a new style of painting which is marked by rhythmic beauty and introduces us to a romantic cult of innocent womanhood.

MOHINDER SINGH RANDHAWA
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CHAPTER ONE

THE PUNJAB HILL STATES LAND, PEOPLE AND THEIR CULTURE

Every art bears the impress of its environment. Hence to understand an art it is necessary to know the landscape of the country which gave birth to it, its soil and crops, and the people whose creative urges it reflects. After all, the artists and their patrons were also the creatures of the physical environment, and the mental and spiritual climate which prevailed when the art with which they were associated was born.

The Rajput States of the Punjab Hills, about forty-four in number, extended from Tehri Garhwal in the east to Jammu in the west. The Jammu group comprised twenty-two States, which were situated west of the river Ravi, and the Kangra group east of the Ravi had a similar number. The Hindu States of the Kangra group are now included in Himachal Pradesh.

Originally the Punjab Hills were ruled by the local barons, called Ranas. They were numerous and each owned a few villages which enjoyed the protection of his tiny castle. In the twelfth century they were overwhelmed by Rajput refugees from Rajasthan and Central India who established new dynasties. In the early seventeenth century, they came under Mughal hegemony and served the Mughal empire as its soldiers. In the close of the seventeenth century these States experienced a cultural renaissance. The original centre of this movement was Basohli where, under the patronage of Raja Kirpal Pal, a new school of painting developed. Soon after, this style spread to the adjoining States. A second wave of art activity developed about the middle of the eighteenth century. It started at Guler and from there it spread to Basohli and Chamba and reached peak of its glory under Sansar Chand at Tira-Sujanpur and Alampur in Kangra State.

Though from the States of Kangra group a splendid view of the snow-covered Dhauladhar range can be had, most of their territory was actually in the hills of the Siwaliks. The Siwaliks are low and gentle hills, geologically

very young. While the main Himalayan mountains were born about sixty million years ago, the Siwaliks are hardly twenty million years old, and consist mostly of rounded pebbles and layers of clay and sand. These are fluvial deposits and indicate that these hills are actually the uplifted bed of a vast river, which received the combined discharge of all the Himalayan rivers, and is hence given the name of Indo-Brahm by the geologists.

The border chain of the Siwaliks which separates the level plains of the Punjab from the mountain country runs in uniform course from Hajipur on the Beas to Rupar on the banks of the Sutlej. Penetrating into the interior of the mountain system, the hills dissolve into gentle slopes and platforms of tableland, and valleys become convulsed and upheaved. Vigne, the English traveller compared the hills of Mahal Mori to an agitated sea suddenly arrested and fixed into stone. The crests are like angry waves succeeding each other in tumultuous array, and assuming the most fantastic forms. Viewed from a distance, the hills appear bleak and barren, but a closer look reveals romantic glades and hollows in which are luxuriant crops of wheat. From all points the eye rests uninterrupted on a chain of high mountains, the majestic Dhauladhar, whose peaks rise at places to heights of more than 4,572 metres (15,000 ft.). The Dhauladhar separates Kangra from Chamba, and ultimately sinks upon the southern bank of the Ravi in the neighbourhood of Dalhousie.

The Kangra basin is about forty-two km; its breadth is irregular. Towards its eastern extremity it extends in one continuous slope from the base of the hills to the bed of the Beas, a distance of thirty-two km. From end-to-end it is broken by transverse ridges and numerous streams which flow sometimes deep and smooth, and sometimes noisily foaming in the rocky beds.

The hamlets scattered all over the Valley, the tea plantations surrounding Palampur and Baijnath and the backdrop of the Himalayas combine to create a scene of exquisite beauty. The homesteads of people are smothered by clumps of bamboos, *Kachnar* trees (*Bauhinia variegata*), pears and apricots, and are pictures of sylvan elegance. G. C. Barnes, the first British administrator of Kangra district, observed: "I know no spot in the Himalaya which, for beauty and grandeur can compete with the Kangra Valley and these overshadowing hills. No scenery, in my opinion, presents such sublime and delightful contrasts. Below lies the plains, a picture of rural loveliness and repose; the surface is covered with the richest cultivation, irrigated by streams which descend from perennial snows and interspersed with home-

steads buried in the midst of groves and fruit trees. Turning from this scene of peaceful beauty, the stern and majestic hills confront us. Their sides are furrowed with precipitous water courses; forests of oak clothe their flanks and higher up give place to gloomy and funeral pines; above all are wastes of snow or pyramidal masses of granite too perpendicular for the snow to rest on.”*

The Kangra basin finally merges into the Kulu Valley lying at the foot of the mid Himalayas which have a mean elevation of 5,486 metres (18,000 ft.). No description can do justice to the beauty of this tract. On both sides of the Beas are river terraces, which are fertile. Luxuriant rice crops extending for miles blend with the pine forests creating a chequered pattern of gold and green. The tiny hamlets are situated on small hillocks which command a view of the terraced fields. At the back are the high hills clothed by a forest of deodars, the Himalayan cedars. The sweet odours filling the air, the elfin human figures in strange costumes looking like wood spirits, the ever-changing skies, all combine to throw a magic spell over the new comer to these areas.

In the Chamba area the Himalayas present three well-defined snowy ranges. These run more or less parallel to one another, from south-east to north-west. The first range, the one nearest of plains, is the snow-covered Dhauladhar which we have already mentioned. It separates the basin of the Beas from that of the Ravi. The second range is the Pangti Range which forms the watershed between the Ravi and the Chenab. The third is the Zaskar Range lying between the Chenab and the Indus. These ranges are all in general continuity with the main Himalayan chains from the east, and are continued westward into Kashmir territory. The tract between the Dhauladhar and the Pangti Range constitutes the drainage area of the Ravi. It is occupied by the spurs of the high ranges, splaying off at all angles, and intermingling with one another. They are intersected by deep narrow valleys in which flow various streams that bring down their waters to the Ravi. Of these the largest is the Siul, which drains the whole of the north-western portion of the Chamba Valley. The region between the Pangti and Zaskar Ranges is somewhat of an irregular square. It comprises the valley of the Chandrabhaga through nearly hundred twenty eight km of its course.

In these hills, the landscape is always interesting and there is endless variety to charm the eye. The tree line is reached at about 3,505 metres (11,500 ft.) and then the forest ends and the traveller emerges on the mountain

*G. C. Barnes, *Report of the Kangra Settlement*

side. Above him tower massive rocky pinnacles of the high ranges with their drapery of snow, while glaciers fill the hollows between them. Below, the hills and valleys of the lower ranges stretch far into the distance. The ground, though bare as regards trees, is carpetted with alpine flowers of every hue, like potentilla, gentian, Himalayan blue poppy, edelweiss, artemisia and many others. The profusion of this floral display diminishes with the increase in altitude, but many beautiful species are found almost up to the summit of the passes where the rocks are free from snow.

The cultivated area is divided into fields, generally unenclosed but in some parts surrounded by hedges or stone walls. These usually descend in successive terraces, and where the slope of land is rapid they are often no bigger than a billiard table. However, in Dehra and Nurpur tehsils, where the country is less broken, the fields are larger in size.

Irrigation is done by means of *kuls* or miniature cuts drawn from the streams that feed the larger torrents. They have clear and cold water which appears heavenly to a visitor from the hot plains of North India. The sources of water supply for the higher fields lie deep in the hills, the water being taken across steep declivities by tortuous channels, constructed and maintained with considerable labour.

In the outer and mid Himalayas, the soils vary from highly productive loams and detritus to stiff marls and hard clays of low fertility. In the richer loamy soils a wide variety of crops is grown, while in the poorer ones only gram and inferior pulses are raised. In the Kangra Valley the summer crops are rice, maize, potatoes, millets, pulses, ginger and turmeric. The major winter crops are wheat, barley, gram, mustard, linseed and peas. The blue flowers of linseed, and the yellow of mustard lend a gay note to the landscape in the month of March.

In the mid Himalayan region of Kulu and Simla, fruits of temperate climate, such as apples, cherries, persimmons, pears, and apricots are grown. In the lower hills, stone fruits, especially peaches, plums, apricots and almonds are cultivated. In the spring month of March their blossoms make a fine display.

The vegetation of the Kangra Valley is a strange mixture of the tropical and the temperate. The bamboo, the *pipal* and the mango exist side by side with the pine, the oak, the cherry and the barberry. Wild pears, and roses abound and the valleys are decorated by their flowers in spring season.

The population of Kangra is largely Hindu, and consists of Brahmins, Rajputs, Gaddis and Ghirths. The Rajputs and the Brahmins abjure manual labour and spurn cultivation of land. The burden of cultivation falls on the Ghirths who are the hewers of wood and drawers of water, and hence less attractive in appearance.¹

Rajputs, though land owners, mainly rely on service in the Indian Army. They supplement their pensions with share-cropping with their tenants. The descendants of all the noble houses of Rajputs are distinguished by the honourable title of Mian. When approached by their inferiors, they receive the peculiar salutation of *jai dia* offered to no other caste. In former days great importance was attached to this salutation, and unauthorised assumption of the privilege was punished as a misdemeanour by heavy fine and imprisonment.

A Mian, to preserve his name and honour unsullied, must scrupulously observe three fundamental maxims : He must never drive the plough; he must never give his daughter in marriage to an inferior, and his women must observe strict seclusion. The prejudice against the plough was strong as the Rajputs felt that their legitimate weapon was the sword and not the plough. Like the knights of Mediaeval Europe, they regarded war and love as their chief occupations. The recent land reforms have greatly eroded the prejudice against ploughing.

The seclusion of women is still maintained though not too rigidly. The Rajput houses are placed in isolated positions, either on the crest of a hill which commands approaches on all sides, or on the verge of a forest. Where natural defences do not exist, an artificial growth is promoted to afford privacy. In front of the dwellings, removed about fifty paces from the house, stands the vestibule, beyond whose precincts no one unconnected with the household can venture to intrude.

Rajput women, though kept in seclusion, were respected and exercised great influence on their husbands like other Indian women. However, they were not highly regarded by their husbands for their wisdom. It was alleged that they lacked foresight and had too many after-thoughts, and relied more on their instincts than on their intelligence. Their judgement of men was often sound. They were loyal and devoted to their husbands. Cases of women immolating themselves with the corpses of their husbands were not uncommon in the past. Reply which Sunjogta gave to her husband Prithviraj, the last Hindu King of Delhi, when consulted as to the best

method of opposing Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, shows the position of women in Rajput society. Her reply was as follows :

“Who asks woman for advice? The world deems their understanding shallow; even when truths issue from their lips, none listen thereto. Yet what is world without woman? We have the forms of Shakti with the fire of Shiva; we are vessels of virtue and of vice, of knowledge and of ignorance. The man of wisdom, the astrologer, can from the books calculate the motion and course of the planets; but in the books of woman he is ignorant; and this is not a saying of today, it ever has been so: our book has not been mastered, therefore, to hide their ignorance, they say, in woman there is no wisdom : Yet woman shares your joys and your sorrows. Even when you depart for the mansion of the sun, we part not. Hunger and thirst we cheerfully partake with you; we are as the lakes, of which you are the swans; what are you when absent from our bosoms ?”*

In the early days of the British rule, Rajputs earned their food mainly by hawking and hunting. As Mr. Barnes observed, “Some lounge away their time on the tops of the mountains, spreading nets for the capture of hawks; for many a day they watch in vain, subsisting on berries and on game accidentally entangled in their nets; at last when fortune grants them success they despatch the prize to their friends below, who tame and instruct the bird for the purpose of sale. Others will stay at home and pass their time in sporting either with a hawk, or if they can afford it, with a gun; one Rajput beats the bushes, and the other carries the hawk ready to spring after any quarry that rises to the view. At the close of the day, if they have been successful they exchange the game for a little meal. The marksman armed with a gun will sit up for wild pigs returning from the fields, and in the same manner barter flesh for the necessaries of life.” In Kangra Painting hunting of ducks with the aid of hawks and shooting of wild boars from behind cover of trees are commonly depicted.

The most remarkable group of people in the Kangra Valley are the Gaddis. The majority of them are Khattris though a few are also Brahmins and Rajputs. In fact they were the first refugees from the plains of the Punjab who sought sanctuary in the Kangra Valley. The tradition is that their ancestors migrated from Lahore during the reign of Aurangzeb when proselytism to Islam was at its height.

Gaddis are a simple, honest, and a virtuous race known for their truth-

*James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Vol II (1832), p 624

fulness. Their simplicity can be judged from the fact that in the early days of the British rule whenever they were fined by the Kangra authorities they would pay an equal penalty into the Chamba treasury, as they were subjects of both. They are lively and cheerful, and on occasions of festivals and marriages get together and spend their time singing, dancing and consuming large quantities of home-brewed rice beer. Their songs have a simple cadence, which is pleasing to the ear.

The Gaddis are shepherds, and the greater part of their wealth consists of flocks of sheep and goats. During winter they graze their flocks in the Kangra Valley, Mandi and Suket. In summer they drive across the Dhauladhar range into Chamba and Lahaul. A gaddi shepherd driving his flock of sheep and hairy goats in the forests of Katrain is a sight not to be forgotten. Many of them own land on both sides of the range, and cultivate the winter crop of wheat in Kangra, and, migrate with their flocks in summer, to Bharmour on the other side of the Dhauladhar where they raise the summer crop.

If the economy of any agricultural tribe can be called self-sufficient, it is that of the Gaddis. Their staple food is barley which they grow in their fields. Parched barley grain, ground into flour and mixed with sugar, serves as their favourite food when they pasture their sheep in high altitudes. Apart from occasional use of mutton, their chief food is goat's milk which they consume in large quantities. For their clothing they depend on the wool of their sheep which their womenfolk spin and weave. Dressed in their white woollen frocks, and wearing high peaked caps, they appear like Anglo-Saxon farmers and shepherds of the sixth century. Shaggy and ferocious-looking black dogs with dented iron collars are their constant companions, and some of them have successful encounters with leopards to their credit.

In the lower parts of the Kangra Valley, men wear turbans, pyjamas, and shirts of cotton cloth. Women wear shirts and *ghagris* or petticoats, and drape their faces with green, yellow, and blue wraps. In the early eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women of upper classes used to wear the *paswaj*, a cotton gown of very light texture which covers the whole body, and was made of various gay colours. *Balu* or the large nose-ring is the popular ornament with them. With the exception of unmarried girls and widows, every woman displays this piece of finery, which is a sign of married life. Except in the lower classes, the *balu* is made of gold, and its circumference is limited only by the taste of the possessor. In Kanga Paintings we often see women wearing *balus*.

The Rajput, Brahmin and Gaddi women of Kangra and Chamba are known for their beauty. They are tall and slender with firm breasts and serene faces. It is not rare to see a woman breast-feeding a child. Rajput women have gentle dark-brown eyes. It is their chiselled Aryan features, and white complexion that we see painted in Kangra Paintings. There is no doubt that the beauty of these women inspired the artists in their creative endeavour.

The western Himalayas are rich in legends, rituals, ceremonies and folklore, which have endured through the centuries on account of their isolation, and dominate the whole social life of the people. The folk songs of Kangra are known for their poetic charm. Their themes are religious as well as romantic. Some songs are in praise of Siva, Rama and the local gods and goddesses, while others sing of the love of Radha and Krishna. Some of the songs praise the sheep, and narrate the charm of the meadows, the mountains, the moonlit nights and the clear dawns. The singers express their gratitude to God for the green grass, the cool water of the streams and the music of the bubbling springs. They are rich in symbolism derived from nature; the pine tree, for instance, is the symbol of the lover in many a folk song.

With song go folk dances which are a living tradition in the hills. They are generally performed during the festivals which are celebrated in the flower-filled Himalayan valleys after the harvesting season. They also form a part of the worship of the village deity. They reflect the joy of community life and are a spontaneous performance, with no previous rehearsal or preparation. The green meadows and open spaces provide the stage, and the spectators are their own kith and kin.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MUGHAL BASE

The Mughals made a strong impact on the life of the people in India and enriched it in many ways. They dug irrigation canals, made roads and constructed caravan-serais. They influenced the dress of the people, their food and above all architecture, gardening, music, poetry and painting.

Who were these Mughals? They were the descendants of the Mongols, and to know their background it is necessary to go into the history of Central Asia. In the middle of the thirteenth century, the great Mongol empire was founded by Chingiz Khan. It extended from China to Eastern Europe and included a good bit of Russia. The Yuan dynasty founded by Kublai Khan ruled China from 1280-1368. Hulagu, grandson of Chingiz Khan, captured Baghdad in 1258 thus bringing the Abbasid dynasty to an end. The above mentioned Mongol rulers were not Moslems. Their religion was Shamanism. Under the Mongols a great revival of Asian trade routes took place. It also led to interchange of artistic traditions between Eastern and Western Asia and Chinese art reached Central Asia and Persia.

By the middle of the fourteenth century, the Mongol rulers of Central Asia were converted to Islam. Islamic trade extended to Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway as is evidenced by finds of Muhammadan coins in different parts of these countries. The Moslem merchants exported to these countries textiles such as muslins, damask, baldachin and rugs, saffron and fruits like orange, lemon and apricot. Timur, who assumed the title of Great Khan in 1369, was a Moslem. However, he destroyed the cities of Islamic Persia and Hindu India with equal impartiality. There was a strange blend of cruelty and artistic sensibility in this man; while he enjoyed raising pyramids of skulls at Isfahan and Delhi, he also created gardens of great beauty at Samarqand where he died in 1405.

The founder of the Mughal dynasty in India was Babur. On the male side he reckoned his descent from Timur, who was a Barlas Turk. His

mother was a descendant of Chingiz Khan, a Mongol. Driven out of his home land, he conquered Kabul after defeating the Afghans. Babur defeated the Pathan king of India, Ibrahim Lodi in 1526 at Panipat and ruled Northern India up to 1530. Babur was a soldier as well as a poet and his Turki poems are still held in esteem in Central Asia. He was fond of wine and music and was a lover of nature. He was influenced by Persian culture as is evident from his love of Persian poetry and adoption of *Chāhar-bagh* design for his gardens at Kabul and Agra. There is no evidence that he was acquainted with Persian miniature paintings of Herat and Tabriz. Even if he was, he did not live long enough to encourage the growth of a School of Painting.

Humayun (1530-1556), who succeeded Babur, was driven out of India by the Afghan, Sher Shah in 1540, and spent part of his 15 years exile in Persia. He imbibed the cultural influence of the Persian Court of Shah Tahmasp, and had an opportunity of admiring the paintings of the court artists. When he was in Kabul in 1550, two talented Persian artists from Shiraz, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad, joined his court. When Humayun regained his throne both these artists accompanied him to Delhi. This cultural exchange had an enormous influence on Indian painting in due course.

Humayun was succeeded by his son Akbar (1556-1605) under whose patronage rose the Mughal School of Painting. He employed more than a hundred painters mostly Hindus who worked under the guidance of the above mentioned Persian artists. Akbar was illiterate but highly intelligent and inquisitive. In fact, his illiteracy was the major factor which promoted painting. As he was unable to read, he asked his artists to illustrate books which were of special interest to him as a visual aid. The first book to be converted into paintings was the *Hamza-nama*, a series of paintings on the adventures of Amir Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet. Martial exploits of his ancestors Timur and Babur also inspired Akbar and hence his artists painted the *Timur-nama* and the *Babur-nama*. His own pictorial diary we find in the illustrated *Akbar-nama*, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. As he respected Hinduism too, the epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, were also illustrated for him by his artists.

The art of painting continued to be encouraged by his son Jahangir (1605-1627). He was a naturalist and loved plants, birds and animals. Like Timur, he too had a streak of cruelty in his character. While he delighted in paintings, poetry and gardens, he also enjoyed the sight of his enemies being crushed under the feet of elephants.

While his main passion was architecture, Shah Jahan (1627-1658) continued

to give his patronage to artists. His son and successor Aurangzeb (1658--1707) was an orthodox Moslem who chased out painters from his court. Thus came the first dispersal of artists trained in Mughal style to Rajput States of Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills.

After Aurangzeb's demise there was revival of interest in painting at the Mughal Court, and his successors Bahadur Shah (1707-1712), Farrukh Siyar (1713-1719) and Muhammad Shah (1719-1748) encouraged painting. Some of the paintings relating to the reign of Muhammad Shah are of exquisite beauty. It was an age of pleasure and themes of revels in moonlight, courtesans being escorted to their royal patrons, and music parties were popular themes with the artists.

The luxury of the court and its arts suffered a severe shock in 1738 when the Persian adventurer Nadir Shah defeated the army of Muhammad Shah at Panipat and occupied Delhi. While it proved a misfortune for Delhi, it led to the evolution of new styles of painting of haunting beauty in the courts of the rulers of the Punjab Hill States. The new style, while it accepted the techniques of Mughal painting viz. use of hand made Sialkoti paper and mineral colours, it had a spirit of its own. The landscape of the hills combined with erotic charm of *Shringar* literature in Sanskrit and Hindi poetry, led to the development of a charming style, so different from the Mughal.



Fig 1. *Fort at Haripur Guler*

CHAPTER THREE

GULER, THE BIRTH-PLACE OF A NEW STYLE OF PAINTING

Guler was a small State in the Punjab Hills, and its capital was Haripur, a town, now in a state of decay. Haripur lies in the hollow of an arc-like mountain range, capped by a fort to the north and the temple of Durga to the south. In front is the river Banganga, set in a deep ravine. In the monsoons it is a raging torrent, while during the rest of the year there is hardly a trickle of water in its bed, which is strewn with rounded pebbles. When it is in high flood, a ferry boat plies to Haripur. A flight of steps paved with white stones leads to a lofty gateway, carved with figures of Rama and Hanuman, the protecting deities of the town. A winding path

paved with white stones leads to Haripur. Around the trunks of trees are platforms of rounded stones on which the wayfarers rest. The streets and the walls of the houses present a curious mosaic of white pebbles. The houses nestle under the shade of giant banyan and *pipal* trees. Haripur gives an impression of Rip Van Winkle's sleepy hollow, and it contains many ruined temples and dried up tanks.

Hugel, the Austrian traveller, who saw Haripur Guler in 1835, had a more favourable impression. He states that the houses were clean and in front of them was usually a small garden stocked with lilies, balsam, rose and jasmine. Men wore trousers and black turbans and invariably had dark, long beards. Women wore blue petticoats with a deep-red border and a pink veil on the head. Now this place is no longer prosperous, and the appearance of the people with their pinched faces conveys an impression of poverty. Beards and black turbans are no longer popular with men, and women wear black petticoats and veils of various colours. The houses are, however, still clean and plantains are commonly grown in the backyards fenced with hedges of wild rose. Plantains figure prominently in Guler Paintings.

Beyond the bazaar is the *maidan*, a level piece of land, where the Rajas used to play polo. At the corners of the polo ground are ruined temples. From here we get a view of the fort which is still impressive and dominates the town of Haripur (Fig. 1). It was much damaged by the earthquake of 1905, and shattered by the tentacle-like roots of the *pipal* trees which had grown in the cracks in the walls, but continues to survive.

The name Guler is derived from the word *Gwala* which means cowherd and its former name was Gwaler, the place of the cowherd. It was founded by Raja Hari Chand who was the ruler of Kangra in 1405. He had gone out hunting, and while in pursuit of a boar got separated from his companions. After dusk when he was wandering alone in the forest, he fell into a neglected well. After many days, he was rescued by a merchant who was passing by leading a string of mules. In his absence, his younger brother ascended the throne presuming him to be dead, and his wives burnt themselves on the funeral pyre. On learning about these events, Hari Chand who was a very noble person moved to the present site of Haripur. Here he met a cowherd who pointed out to him the place where you see the fort. The cowherd was sacrificed and his head buried under the foundation of the fort to ensure its stability.

The Rajas of Guler, Rup Chand (1610-1635), Bikram Singh (1635-1661)

and Dalip Singh (1695-1743), were the *mansabdars* of the Mughals and were in touch with the Mughal culture. While there are solitary portraits of Rup Chand, Bikram Singh and Raj Singh, there are many of Dalip Singh. It seems that during the latter part of Dalip Singh's rule, artists were already in Guler. In the *Dalip Ranjani* which is dated 1707, and contains genealogy of the Rajas of Guler, there is mention of artists. Most of the paintings of Dalip Singh are in the early primitive style which is named after Basohli. The daughter of Dalip Singh married Medini Pal (1722-1736) of Basohli, and the sister of Medini Pal married Govardhan Chand. This may have led to migration of some artists from Basohli to Guler.

It was Govardhan Chand (1743-1773) who was the most notable patron of painting at Haripur Guler. There are numerous portraits of this Raja in the Chandigarh Museum, as well as in other museums and private collections. This indicates that he was a patron of art. In one of these, he is shown dressed in magnificent clothes mounted on a powerful horse (Plate I). There is a legend that the horse attracted the attention of Nawab Adina Beg, the Moslem Governor of the Punjab plains, but Govardhan Chand refused to part with it. No honourable Rajput would part with his horse, his sword and his concubine. Govardhan Chand did not break the tradition. Apart from this incident there is little mention of this Raja by Hutchison and Vogel in their *History of the Punjab Hill States*. This indicates that he enjoyed a peaceful reign. History is usually a record of strife and takes little note of periods of peace. Yet the reign of Govardhan Chand proved to be the most creative in the history of art in Northern India.

Another painting provides us a glimpse of his domestic life (Plate II). Govardhan Chand is seated in a room in his palace reclining against a bolster with his young daughter in his lap. Opposite him is his son Parkash Chand. Behind Parkash Chand is his Balaury Rani from Basohli holding a child. At the sides are maidservants, two of whom are holding fly-whisks of peacock feathers. Seated on the cotton carpet in front are two boys. They were called *sirtoras*, the progeny of servant girls. While the portraits of males are based on actual observation, those of women are based on conjecture, as on account of *pardah*, no outsider could see them. For representing their faces the artists adopted stylised formulae, and that is why they look alike. These facial formulae could be seen in other paintings as well, and it is thus that we get a clue to dating and provenance of these paintings.

Parkash Chand (1773-1790) succeeded Govardhan Chand on his demise. He was a spendthrift and was heavily in debt. In a painting we see him with



Plate I

Raja Govardhan Chand riding his favourite horse.
(Guler, about 1750 — Chandigarh Museum)



Plate II

Raja Govardhan Chand with his family.
(Guler, about 1760, Chandigarh Museum)



Plate III

Balauri Rani of Raja Parkash Chand with her son Bhup Singh.
 (Guler, 1780, Chandigarh Museum)



Plate IV

Young Raja Bhup Singh on tour in his realm.
(Guler, about 1800, Chandigarh Museum)

his moneylenders. The Rajas of Hill States were innocent of the complexity of finance, and left such matters to their ministers, who were supposed to look after their financial problems as best as they could. Parkash Chand lacked administrative ability but was a generous and an amiable person whose domestic life was happy. We reproduce a delightful painting where his Balaury Rani from Basohli is shown seated in a pavilion talking to her son Bhup Singh. One of the maid-servants is offering him a wooden toy. On the roof of the pavilion is a peacock, and in the foreground is a pool with a fountain. A monkey is drinking water from the pool totally unafraid. Women musicians are singing and playing on musical instruments. A servant girl is feeding a parrot (Plate III). The painting reflects felicity and rural calm, such as we can still experience in the Kangra Valley.

That some of the master artists were still working at Guler till late in the eighteenth century is evident from a painting in which young Raja Bhup Singh (1790-1820) is shown riding out in his domain accompanied by his retinue (Plate IV). A servant is waving a large peacock fan, an insignia of royalty. Drummers are lustily beating drums, warning people of the arrival of the Raja. Following Bhup Singh on horse back is his Minister Dhyan Singh, who later on set himself up as independent ruler of Kotla Fort. In the foreground are servants carrying carpets which were spread at the camping site. The painting provides a vast panoramic view of the hills, as we see in paintings of the *Bhagavata Purana*.

Who were the artists responsible for art activity at Guler? The Rajas of Guler, Govardhan Chand and Parkash Chand were married at Basohli, a State with a tradition of art dating to the late seventeenth century. Perhaps the early painting at Guler during the rule of Dalip Singh was due to artists who may have migrated from Basohli. However, the painting at Guler after 1740 is in a different style. Like the Mughal style of Muhammad Shah period it is characterised by elegant naturalism and yet it breathes a different spirit. It bears the impress of the lovely landscape of the Siwalik Hills with their rivers, forests and birds. Its female types reflect the beauty of the women of Kangra Valley. Above all, it has the sensuous charm of Sanskrit poetry and Hindi poetry which celebrate the loves of Radha and Krishna. Thus, an altogether gentle art evolved from the Mughal style. Its main concern was religion, and not portraiture of kings and nobles and their harem life as in Mughal Painting. Here is an art which is inspired by the beauty of the mountains of the outer Himalaya.

Portraits of a family of artists exist in the Chandigarh Museum, and Lahore Museum which provided a puzzle to art critics. The head of this family was

Seu who had two sons, Nain Sukh and Manak. Manak had only one son Khushala by name. Nain Sukh had four sons, Nikka, Kama, Gaudhu and Ranjha. This family has been traced to Guler. Very likely Seu with his two sons, Manak and Nain Sukh, was working at Delhi or Lahore. When life became uncertain and hazardous at these places following Nadir Shah's invasion, they returned to their native place Haripur Guler, which was no longer a poverty-stricken town. Insecurity in the plains had not only driven the artists to the mountains but the merchants with their caravans of mules and horses also sought the shelter of the lower hills on their way from Delhi to Jammu. The trade route was now in the lower hills from Nahan, Bilaspur, Siba, Guler, Nurpur, Basohli and Jammu. By levying toll on the merchants, the Rajas of these States became affluent and could patronize artists.

It seems Manak worked at Guler and the best paintings relating to the rule of Govardhan Chand were painted by him. Nain Sukh migrated to Jammu where he worked for Balwant Singh. There is a dated painting of him by Nain Sukh painted in 1748. After the death of Balwant Singh, Nain Sukh migrated to Basohli where he worked for Amrit Pal. Nain Sukh and Amrit Pal seem to have died in the same year as there is evidence from the records of the Brahmin priests at Hardwar that their ashes were immersed in the Ganga in 1778.

Nikka migrated to Chamba and there with his sons Harkhu and Chhaju developed Chamba Painting. Ranjha worked at Basohli, and his sons, Gur Sahai and Sukh Dayal, worked at Guler. There are a number of charming paintings by Gur Sahai painted at Guler. There is evidence from the records of Brahmin priests of Kurukshetra discovered by Dr B. N. Goswamy that Gur Sahai was alive in 1827.

An example of early painting at Guler is Plate V which contains Mughal elements with Kangra features. The mountains in the background are painted in the Mughal style which follows the Persian model which is not seen in any other hill painting. It is a unique example of a painting showing a pure landscape with birds and animals. In a corner a peacock is dancing admired by peahens. Under the shade of a tilted mountain are the *chakoras*, the moon partridges which figure in paintings showing love scenes in moonlight. These birds feel happy in moonlight and shout with joy when they see the moon, and are hence regarded as lovers of the moon. The poets imagine that they drink moon-beams. The white birds with long legs standing in water are sarus cranes. They are mostly found in pairs and if one is shot, the other feels lonely and pines away. Hence they are regarded as symbols

of true love. A pair of birds to the left swimming in the water are *chakvās* (*Casarca ferruginea*). Legend relates that pairs of these birds are souls of two sinning lovers who are said to sleep apart at night and call endlessly to one another, 'chakvā', may I come?' The male replies, 'No chakvī.' Flocks of deer are also seen in this painting. In the foreground is a *bārāsinghā* with long antlers galloping with its female companion. Two black bucks with long, spirally twisted horns are shown with three females in the centre of the painting. In Pahari Paintings a black buck is often a symbol of the absent lover. In the lake are lotuses which are much admired for their pink flowers. Most of these birds and animals, later on, figure in the famous series of paintings of the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Gita Govinda*. Was the artist preparing for those great works in this manner?

A hunting scene is shown in Plate VI. If we compare it with Plate V, we notice that the manner in which mountains are painted has changed. The rim of the mountains has a light yellow wash. This is a characteristic of early paintings from Guler. The queens and princes are dressed in Mughal fashion. A queen is sitting behind a bush, aiming a gun at a black buck. The barrel of the gun is supported on the shoulders of a female servant. In the foreground are servants holding a black buck and a female deer to decoy the herd. In the centre a queen and a prince are chasing a flock of deer on horseback. The queen has thrown a bow on the neck of a black buck, a feat of rare courage. On the top is shown a mountain lake with ducks floating, and sarus cranes frolicking. A hunting party is arriving carrying hawks, who will soon play havoc with the innocent birds in the lake.

Romances of Punjab, Sassi and Punnun, Heer and Ranjha and Sohni and Mahinwal were favourite themes with Pahari artists. The romance of Sassi Punnun relates to Sind when it was occupied by Moslem invaders. Briefly the story is as follows.

Sassi, a beautiful girl, was born to a Brahman King. At her birth it was prophesied that she was destined to fall in love with a Moslem, and would die of grief of separation while searching for her lover in a lonely desert. In order to save the honour of the family and the girl from her tragic fate she was shut in a box and floated down the Indus. The box attracted the attention of a childless washerman, who brought her up as his own daughter at Bhambhore.

Sassi grew up into a girl of dazzling beauty and attracted attention of all the young men of the neighbourhood, but she spurned their advances. On

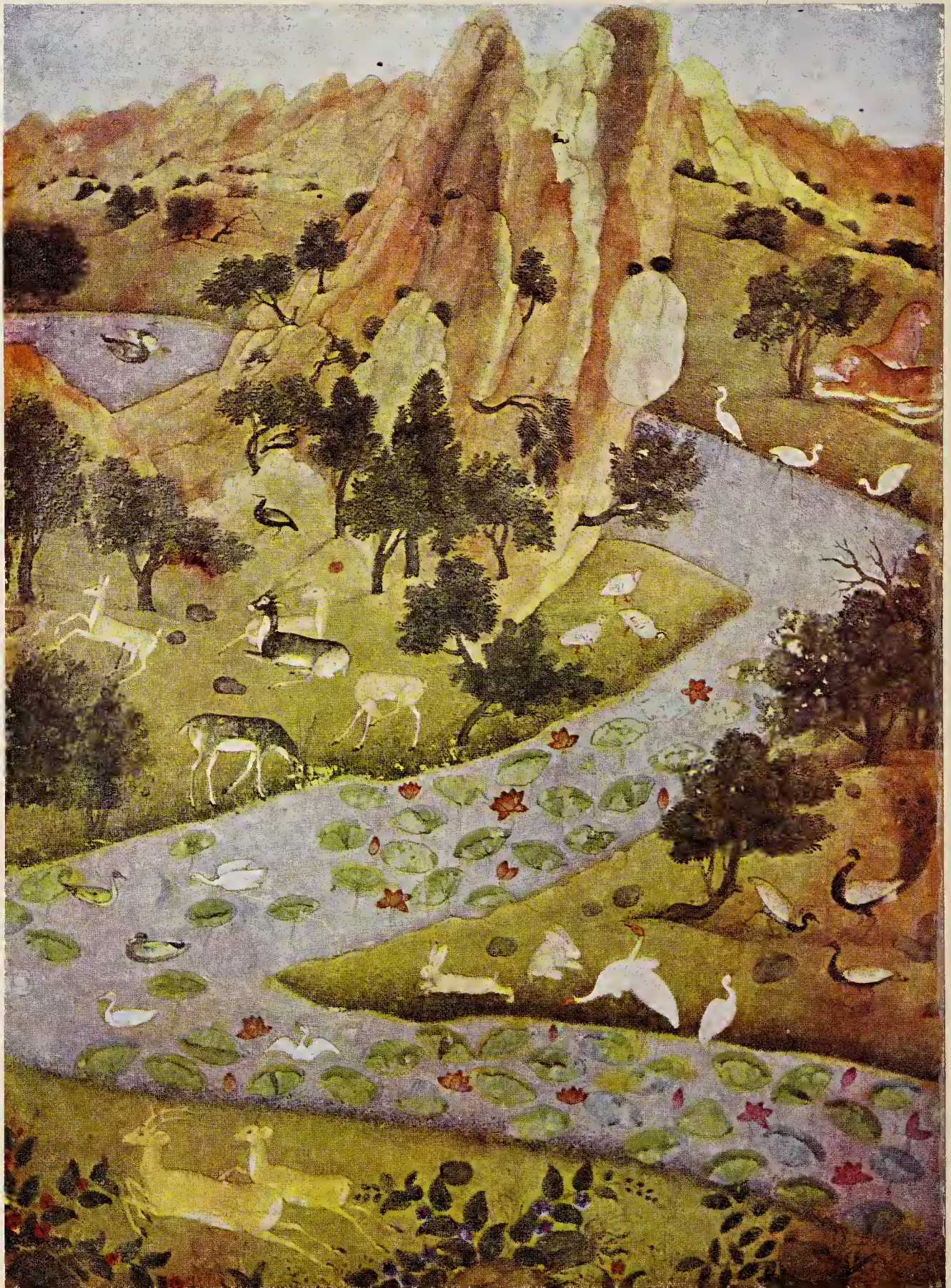


Plate V

Landscape with birds and animals.

(Guler, about 1740, National Museum, New Delhi)



Plate VI

Begums hunting.

(Guler, about 1740, Chandigarh Museum)



Plate VII

Sassi bewailing loss of her lover, Punnun.
(Guler, about 1750, National Museum, New Delhi)



Plate VIII

Lady by the lotus pool.

(Guler, about 1800, Chandigarh Museum)

a visit to a garden of a rich merchant she saw a portrait of Punnun, the son of the King of Kecham in Baluchistan and fell in love with him.

Some visiting merchants from Kecham claimed the handsome Punnun as their brother and told her all about him. She thereupon had them imprisoned, and said that they would be released only if they would arrange for Punnun's arrival at Bhambhore. One of their leaders went all the way to Kecham and begged for help for their release, but Punnun's father Hot Ali would do nothing. Then the leader met Punnun and described Sassi's beauty and love for him. Punnun rode straight to Bhambhore and encamped in Sassi's garden where he set his camels to graze. The gardener complained of this trespass to Sassi who, accompanied by her girl-friends came and took the camel-men to task. But when she saw Punnun asleep under a tree she fell in love with him.

Sassi and Punnun lived happily at Bhambhore and Punnun refused to go back home. His companions returned to Kecham and reported to Hot Ali all that had happened there. He flew into a rage and commanded his other sons to go straight to Bhambhore and to fetch him back. The brothers reached Bhambhore, and played a mean trick with Punnun. They made him drunk and carried him off on a camel. When Sassi awoke and found that Punnun had been taken away she cried and set off in search of him. Sassi suffered great hardships in the desert but could not find him. The horrors of the desert, the rigours of the journey and the pangs of separation exhausted her. But they could not shake her love and faith, and she continued her search with determination. During her wanderings in the desert a goat-herd tried to outrage her modesty. Finding herself in a hopeless situation and thoroughly exhausted, Sassi at last laid her head on what she supposed to be a foot-print of her lover's camel, and breathed her last. Seeing this tragedy, the goat-herd repented. He rushed to her side, and buried her in that very spot. Later on he became a faqir and installed himself as the guardian of her grave.

Punnun saw Sassi in a dream, and she beckoned him to her grave. Meanwhile Punnun, resisting the entreaties of his brothers, rushed back to be with his sweetheart. On reaching the place, he heard from the goat-herd about the tragic happening and fell unconscious. The grave reopened to receive him, and thus the lovers were united in death.

Sassi typifies Indian ideal of womanhood, selfless, devoted and loyal to her lover for whose sake she bore great hardships and ultimately sacrificed herself. Her selfless love inspired the poets and the people of

Punjab and Sind. A fine tribute to her love was paid by the Punjabi poet Hashim who wrote a ballad which is still popular in Punjab on both sides of the border. The artists of Guler have presented the tragedy of Sassi and Punnun in a painting which is unique for its simplicity and pathos. In this painting we see Punnun on the camel held by his brother escorted by two soldiers, while Sassi, who is anxious to follow him, is being held back by her girl friends (Plate VII).

The major theme of Kangra Painting is love. A favourite text with the painters was the *Rasikapriyā* of the poet Keshav Das (fl. 1580-1601). He was the court poet of Raja Madhukar Shah of Orchha in Central India. The *Rasikapriyā* is a Hindi treatise in verse on rhetoric and literary analysis. It derives inspiration from the Krishna cult. The *nayaka* and *nayika* in the *Rasikapriyā* are Krishna and Radha, the ideal lovers, symbols of God and Soul. God is realized not through austerities and mortification of human flesh, but through love. In this cult there is no distinction between sacred and profane. Just as in the union of lovers, a state of ecstasy is achieved, so is God realization. In the absolute self-surrender of the human soul as represented by Radha to the Divine in Krishna is summed up all love.

Love is classified into two categories, viz. love in separation and love in union. There are ten states of love in separation, among which are longing and anxiety. There are numerous paintings of *virahini nāyikās* or ladies separated from their lovers suffering from anxiety and love longings. They are portrayed as solitary figures clasping a plantain, fondling a black buck, standing in a balcony admiring the rain-clouds and sarus cranes. We reproduce a charming painting from Guler in which a lady is pacing the parapet of a lotus pool (Plate VIII). It is the hot month of July, in which lotuses are in bloom in India. The lotus leaves and flowers are topsy-turvy and are symbolic of the state of her mind. Dark clouds with flashes of lightning are shown in the horizon.

Tobacco was introduced in India by the Portuguese during the reign of Akbar. Though Akbar himself did not smoke, tobacco smoking became popular among the aristocracy. In Guler Paintings from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, ladies are commonly shown smoking hookah. In a charming painting from Guler, a lady holding the branch of a flowering creeper is indulging in this pastime. Above her, leaves of a plantain are swaying suggestively. In the foreground is a gushing fountain, a symbol of her secret desire. Near the fountain a drake is pursuing a female duck. It

is by such poetic symbols that the Guler artists convey the feelings of *virahini nāyikās* in their paintings (Plate IX).

In a number of Guler Paintings bathing beauties are depicted. Radha is bathing in a secluded corner of her home. A maidservant is screening her by holding a green sheet. All these precautions, however, prove ineffective. Krishna, sitting in the window of a room upstairs, is having a glimpse of her charms. Her jet-black hair frame her beautiful bust (Plate X).

The rainy month of July is always welcome in India. The earth gets parched in hot June, the sky is coppery and the air is full of dust. Hot winds blow and scorch the vegetation. Then come the rains, and the thirsty brown earth gets covered with green grass. The sound of the approaching rain-shower and the sight of the rolling slate-blue clouds fill the hearts of lovers with bliss. As the rivers rush to meet the sea, and vines embrace the stems of trees, and lightning sports with the clouds, the lovers also meet in July. We reproduce a painting showing love in union. The lovers are standing on a terrace admiring a flight of sarus cranes (Plate XI). At the back are two maid-servants, one holding an umbrella and a towel, and the other a fly-whisk of peacock feathers. Ambling on the bank of the lotus lake are sarus cranes, symbols of faithful love. In a corner, women musicians are playing music. This enchanting painting was acquired by the Chandigarh Museum from Raja Baldev Singh of Guler, and shows the Guler style in full maturity.

Some paintings illustrating love in union show more intimate love scenes. We reproduce a painting from the collection of the National Museum of India, illustrating the month of August (Plate XII). Painting of twelve months or *Baramasa*, as they are called in Hindi, was a favourite theme with the Pahari painters, and there are many sets of paintings on this theme. In August, the moist air is drenched with the fragrance of jasmynes, gardenias and the *champaka*. The lovers are seated in a pavilion engulfed by vegetation. The mango tree to the right is laden with luscious fruit. There is no fruit in the world which can compare in flavour with the mangoes. The mango trees are twined by jasmine creepers. The mango is the symbol of the male and the jasmine of the female. Perched in the branches are *papeehas*, the hawk-cuckoos, the love-birds who shout incessantly, '*Pi-kahan*',—'Where is my love' ? In the sky, dark clouds are gathering and among them lightning is playing. The leaves of plantains are swaying suggestively in the gentle breeze. It is by such symbols that the Guler painters give poetic significance to their paintings.

Some paintings provide a glimpse into the private life of the Guler princes. Plate XIII belongs to this category. Lovers are abed, exchanging love talk. There is absolute stillness and there is no possibility of intrusion by servants or others.

A more intimate love scene is depicted in Plate XIV. That is why it seems to have roused the ire of a puritan who tore it. The torn pieces were joined and found their way to the Chandigarh Museum. The crescent moon shining above the mountains framed by the window of the pavilion lends enchantment to this romantic painting.

Paintings from Guler have great charm. Their colour is pure and delicate. The line is firm and unswerving in its flow. The artists were great masters and painted with confidence.

The role of Guler in the evolution of Pahari Painting is thus summed up by Archer : 'The State of Guler played a decisive part in the development of Pahari Painting in the eighteenth century. Not only did it develop a local art of the greatest delicacy and charm, but the final version of this Guler style was taken to Kangra in about 1780, thus becoming the 'Kangra' style itself. Guler is not merely one of the thirty-eight small centres of Pahari Art. It is the originator and breeder of the greatest style in all the Punjab Hills.'*

Subsequent research has confirmed Archer's thesis, and if any place can be called the birth-place of Kangra Painting, it is Guler.

*W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills*, p17



Plate IX

Lady by the fountain.

(Guler, about 1780, Chandigarh Museum)



Plate X
Sight of the beloved.
 (Guler, about 1780, Chandigarh Museum)



Plate XI

Lovers admiring sarus cranes.
(Guler, about 1810, Chandigarh Museum).



Plate XII

Lovers in a garden pavilion.

(Guler, about 1780, National Museum, New Delhi)



Plate XIII

Lovers abed.

(Guler, about 1815, Chandigarh Museum)



Plate XIV

A love scene.

(Guler, about 1810, Chandigarh Museum)



Fig. 2 *The ruined palace of Rajas at Basohli*

CHAPTER FOUR

GULER PAINTING AT BASOHLI

The Jammu group of Hill States also included Basohli, a small state with hardly seventy-four villages. Its founder was Bhog Pal (A. D. 765), son of a Raja of Kulu who founded Balaur, the ancient capital of the State. Bhupat Pal shifted the capital to Basohli in 1635. Originally the place selected was on the left bank of the Ravi but on account of its exposed position and vulnerability it was shifted to the plateau on the right bank where it now stands. At present, Basohli is a small town with a population of about 7000. The houses are of clay and stones with flat roofs.

Bhupat Pal was succeeded by Sangram Pal (1635-1673), a handsome

prince who became a favourite at the court of Shah Jahan. Even the Mughal queens admired him for his beauty. It is very likely that during the last part of his rule painting developed at Basohli, though credit for its patronage is usually given to his son Kirpal Pal (1687-1693), who was a scholar and patron of art and literature. It was largely during the rule of Kirpal Pal that painting in Basohli style, with bold use of primary colours, blue, yellow and red, developed. These Basohli paintings are characterized by primitive vigour and savage intensity. The female type has large intense eyes, receding foreheads and passionate expression. The diamonds studding the ornaments in these paintings were made from shining metallic wings of beetles, and pearl necklaces of raised white paint. A famous series on Bhanu Datta's poem *Rasamanjari*, or Bouquet of Delight was painted for Kirpal Pal by the artist Devi Das in 1694-1695. These paintings are much admired for their vibrant colours. However, these are not the paintings which are the concern of this book, which deals with the new style as it developed at Guler.

During the rule of Amrit Pal (1757-1776) Basohli was a prosperous place. We have already mentioned how the trade route from Delhi to Kashmir was deflected on account of disturbed conditions in the Punjab plains to the hills in the middle of the eighteenth century. Basohli was on this route and was the beneficiary of this development. About seven hundred families of Kashmiri *pashmina* weavers had settled here and built up a prosperous trade. The main attraction of Basohli was the Raja's palace, a magnificent building overlooking the town and the river Ravi with the background of snow-covered Pir Panjal. Bhupat Pal (1573-1635) laid the foundations of the palace and his successors Sangram Pal, Hindal Pal, Kirpal Pal (1650-1693), Dhiraj Pal (1670-1725), Medini Pal (1695-1730), and Amrit Pal (1749-1776) made additions to it from time to time. Mahendra Pal (1806-1813) built the Rang Mahal and Shish Mahal, which were decorated with mural paintings. Mian Kahn Singh, the historian of Basohli, states that the Rang Mahal, which means a 'Painted Palace,' was embellished with paintings of *Nayikas* and erotic themes. The Rang Mahal was a magnificent structure and attracted the attention of travellers, though the town itself had declined.

Vigne, the English traveller who visited Basohli in 1835 observed : "Bissuli contains a large and slovenly-looking bazaar, and the place would hardly, as far as I could judge, be worth the traveller's notice, were it not for the baronial appearance of the palace of the old Rajas, which I thought the very finest building of the kind I had seen in the East. Its square turrets, open and embattled parapets, projecting windows, Chinese-roofed balconies, and moat-like tank in front presented a general appearance, which, without

entering into specific detail, was sufficient to remind me of some of the most ancient red-brick structures of my own country. When viewed at the distance of a few miles from the path to Jammu, it rises in relief from the dark masses of the lower ranges, with a grandeur that I thought not inferior to that of Heidelberg ; while with reference to more general effect the line of snowy peaks, which are seen peering over the mountains immediately around it are sufficient to render its relative position immensely superior.”* Now the palace is a horrible ruin, and its subterranean chambers which have defied the destructive hand of time, are haunt of flying foxes. On the ruins of the palace troops of monkeys play about, claiming to be its sole possessors. A solitary *chhatra* capping the ruin reminds us of its lost grandeur (Fig. 2).

Below the palace is a masonry tank, its water almost bluish green due to the growth of algae. Adjoining it is the temple of Nilkanth Mahadev, also built by Raja Bhupat Pal. It is said that the *lingam*, Siva's phallic symbol, installed in this shrine was originally blue in colour and that it was in the possession of the Raja of Kashtwar. It was a common belief that one saw the image of one's past incarnation, when one looked at it. The Rani of Kashtwar when she peered at the *lingam* saw the image of a female monkey. She felt deeply annoyed, threw the *lingam* into the fire, and hence it turned black. On account of the insult to the deity, Kashtwar was visited by famine and drought and was subsequently invaded by Bhupat Pal, who brought the *lingam* to Basohli, where he installed it in the present temple. Even now, when there is a failure of rain, the *lingam* is placed in the open space below the temple, the Brahmins offer prayers and it is said that this practice brings on a downpour.

Amrit Pal was a contemporary of Raja Govardhan Chand of Guler. He was a patron of painting, though his taste differed from that of his predecessors, and he preferred the delicacy of Guler style to the barbaric vigour of Basohli style. He not only enlarged the palace, but also encouraged artists from Guler to paint for him in the new style. We reproduce a portrait of Amrit Pal in which he is depicted standing in a garden (Fig. 3). Some of the portraits of his predecessor Jit Pal (1736-1757) are in Guler style, and hence it is likely that artists from Guler were already settled at Basohli during the latter part of his rule. This was facilitated by the fact that one of the Ranis of Govardhan Chand was from Basohli and his son Parkash Chand also had a wife from this State.

* G. T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir and Ladakh*, Vol. I, p. 125



Fig.3 *A portrait of Raja Amrit Pal of Basohli*

That painting in Guler style was also done at Basohli was not known, till the first author paid a visit to this place in October 1957. There he met Kunj Lal, an old man, whose ancestors were court physicians of the Rajas of Basohli. He had a large collection of paintings with him, which his ancestors had got from the Rajas of Basohli in the period of their decline. Some of the paintings from his collection were donated to the Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu, while the most attractive ones including the famous Nala Damayanti series and others were presented by him to Dr. Karan Singh. Some paintings out of Kunj Lal's collection acquired by Professor J. K. Galbraith were displayed in an exhibition organized by the Asia Society at New York in 1965 and published in a catalogue entitled, '*Gods, Thrones and Peacocks*'. These were donated by Professor Galbraith to Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.

Who were the artists who painted these lovely paintings ? Dr B. N. Goswami, a Punjabi scholar following the clues provided by the researches of the first author, adopted a novel approach to unravel this mystery.* Brahmin priests at the Hindu places of pilgrimage like Hardwar and Kurukshetra record the names and parentage of their clients who visit these places. Thus a valuable record extending over 250 years is available. Goswami discovered an entry in the ledger of a Brahmin priest of Hardwar that Nain Sukh came to that place in the company of Raja Amrit Pal in 1763, while on his way to Jagannath Puri. There is also evidence that sons of Nain Sukh, viz. Ranjha, Kama, Gaudhu and Nikka lived at Basohli. They were not only sons of a distinguished artist but they were themselves accomplished artists. Later on, Nikka migrated to Chamba and Gaudhu to Tira Sujampur. Ranjha and Kama worked for the Rajas of Basohli. It is very likely that the paintings which we reproduce are the works of these artists.

According to Keshav Das, women are classified into four types : the lotus (*Padmini*), the Variegated (*Chitrini*), the Conch-like (*Sankhini*) and Elephant-like (*Hastini*). Out of these *Sankhini* and *Hastini* are to be shunned. Ill-tempered, and clever, *Sankhini* has a luxuriant growth of hair, likes red garments and pinches hard when excited. She is impatient, shameless and unhesitating. *Hastini* has thick fingers, a fat face and large feet. Her lower lip and eyebrows are thick and her voice is raucous. Her gait is heavy, her mind infirm. Her tawny hair is of a bitter odour. The hairs on her person are thick, sharp and pointed.

* B. N. Goswami, *Pahari Painting : The Family as the Basis of Style*, Marg, Vol. XXI, 4, 1968

Padmini and *Chitrini* are to be preferred and these categories include all the talented and beautiful women in the world. *Chitrini* is adorned with diverse beauties and accomplishments. She is fond of dancing, music and poetry. Tremulous-eyed, steadfast in mind, delighting in love-sports and possessing a sweet-smelling mouth, she is fond of perfumes and her lover's portrait. Plate XV illustrates a *Chitrini* seated on a terrace overlooking a lake. The enigmatic smile of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa has often been praised. However, the faint smile which hovers over the face of the *Chitrini*, the Lady by the lake-side, has a charm of its own. It is the smile of the gentle womanhood of India, the type of smile that one sees in a jasmine bud when it slowly opens its petals. Her eye-brows are like the bow of Kama, and her eyes are soft and playful as those of a wild gazelle. Over her breasts hangs a necklace of bright pearls, which looks as though over the peaks of the Himalaya flowed the white stream of the Ganga. The folds of her drapery are like the meandering of a mountain stream. The pair of mountains in the background with their gentle curves reflect the charm of the lovely woman, as if Nature herself is vying with her in display of feminine charm.

In some of the Kangra Paintings from Basohli there are charming garden scenes. Plate XVI shows a palace garden. On one side is a marble pavilion with the background of an avenue of mango trees. In the middle is a small pool for ducks. The lady is standing on a terrace and red poppies are growing in the parterres. An avenue of peaches is in blossom. Behind it is a *kanat*, a screen of cloth with a patterned border. The serene beauty of the lady in the garden conforms to the *Padmini* type. *Padmini* is a beautiful *nāyikā*, emitting the fragrance of a lotus from her body, modest, affectionate and generous, slim, free from anger, and with no great fondness for love-sports. Bashful, intelligent, cheerful, clean and soft-skinned, she loves clean and beautiful clothes. She has a golden complexion.

In Plate XVII we see a charming flirtation scene. The lover is seated in a balcony and is eager to have a glimpse of the fair lady. She has however drawn a veil on her face, thus screening her beauty to tantalize the impatient lover.

Lastly we turn to 'a Lady in distress', (Plate XVIII). It is a painting of a *Virahini Nayika*, a lady separated from her lover. She is seated on a terrace overlooking a lake covered with lotuses. In the background is a mountain with a curved rim and the horizon is tinged with red. This is a favourite

device of Guler artists. The lady's maid-servants, who are ministering to her needs, are trying to console her, but she is plunged in grief and her body is burning with the fever of love in separation.

It is with great reluctance that we take leave of these charming ladies from Basohli. In the art of which country is the beauty of woman represented with such delicacy and romantic charm as in these portraits of lovely women ? Now we turn to the neighbouring State of Chamba.

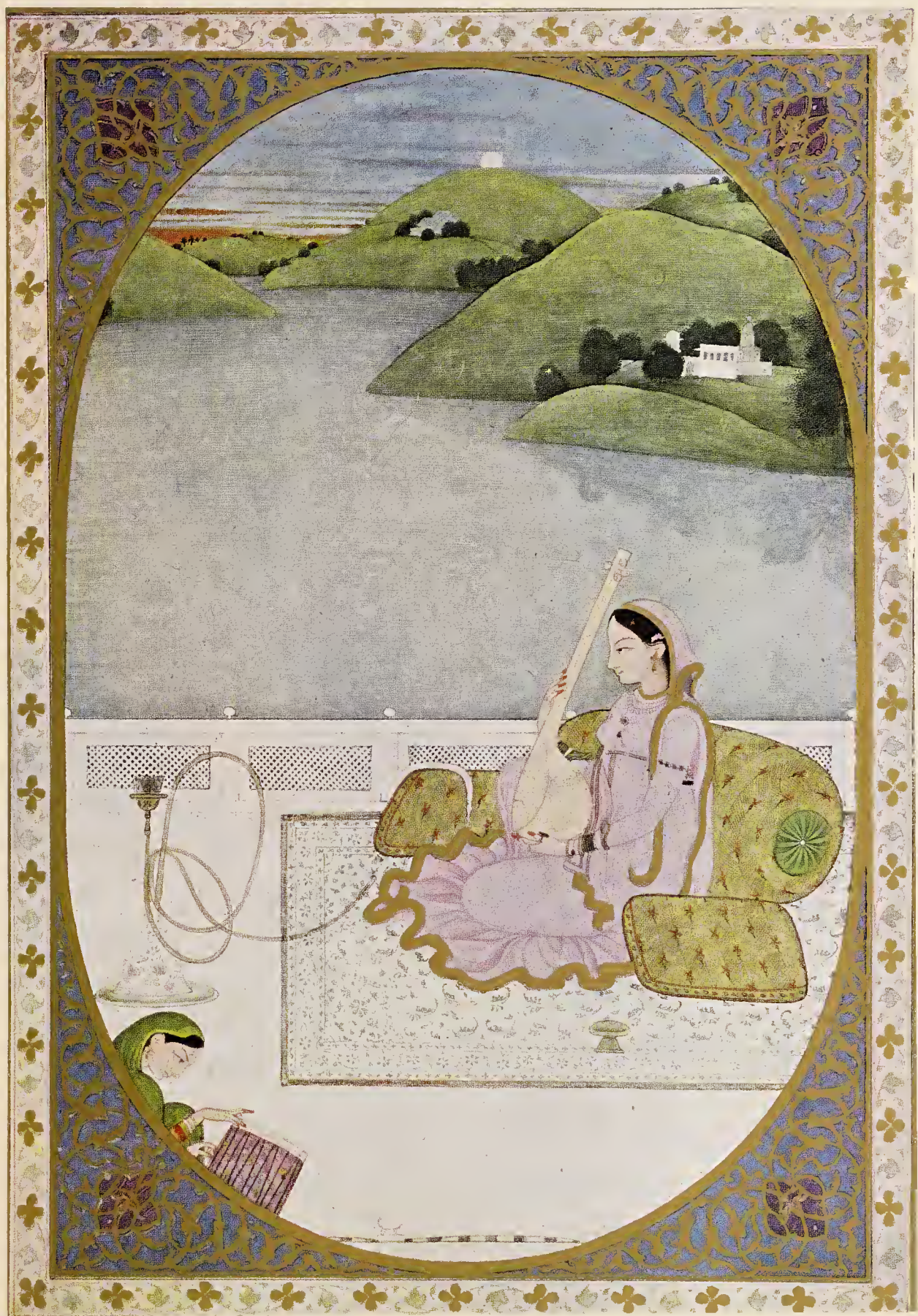


Plate XV

Lady by the lake side.

(Basohli, about 1760, Prof. John Kenneth Galbraith Collection,
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University)

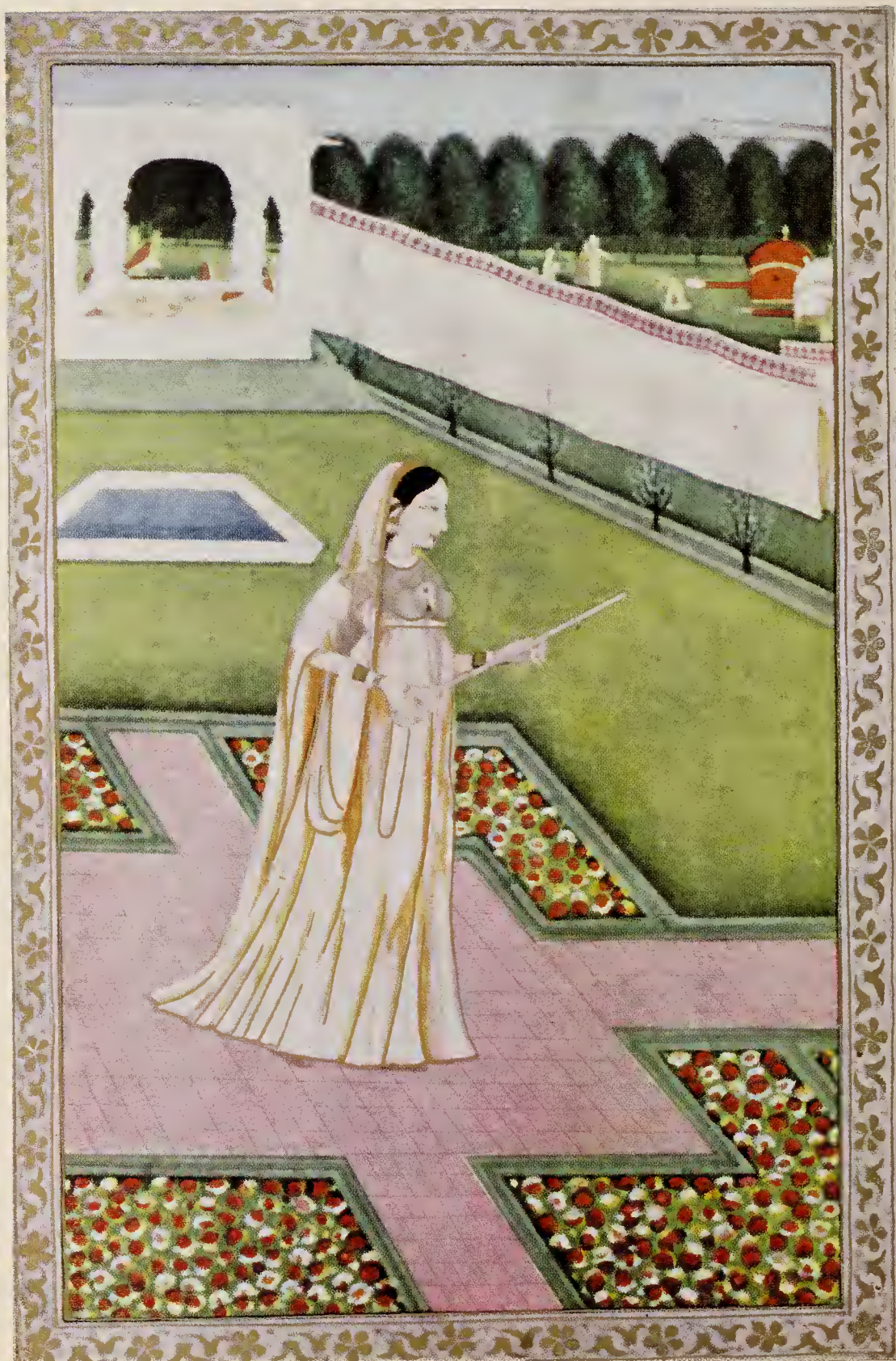


Plate XVI

Lady in the garden.

(Basohli, about 1760, Prof. John Kenneth Galbraith Collection,
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University)



Plate XVII

Flirtation.

(Basohli, about 1765, Prof. John Kenneth Galbraith Collection,
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University)



Plate XVIII

Love-lorn (Virahini Nayika)

(Basohli, about 1765, Prof. John Kenneth Galbraith Collection,
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University)



Fig. 4 Chamba. The Rang Mahal is in the background to the left

CHAPTER FIVE

GULER PAINTING AT CHAMBA

Chamba is the northern-most of the Punjab Hill States. It derives its name from a princess and a tree with fragrant golden flowers *champaka* or *chamba* as it is known in the hills. In Botany it is called *Michelia champaca*. It was a sacred tree of the Hindus and is grown in temple gardens. In Cambodia too, there was a city called Champa. Chamba evokes romantic feelings in the people who admire this jewel of the Punjab Himalayas. A folk song from the hills tells that "The lovely one feels happy in the mountains of Chamba, which are bathed in showers of rain".

Situated in the bosom of the middle Himalayas, Chamba has preserved its identity inviolate during the period when the plains were ravaged by fanatical hordes which poured into India from the mountain fastnesses of Central Asia and Afghanistan. It was once the seat of an ancient Hindu kingdom, founded in the middle of the sixth century, which continued its rule unaffected by the vicissitudes that overtook the kingdoms in the plains of Northern India.

Chamba was for some time subjected to Kashmir and later to the Mughal Empire. After a brief period of subservience to the Sikhs from 1809-1846 it came under British Paramountcy. In 1947, the year of Indian Independence, it was absorbed in the Union Territory of Himachal Pradesh. On account of its remoteness, it has preserved its culture, along with its beautiful temples and ancient palaces. It gives us a glimpse of ancient Hindu India, in the North, in its pristine beauty.

Jammu and Kashmir is to the north-west of Chamba, Lahaul towards its east and Kangra to the south-east and south. Running through it from south-east to north-west are the three mountain ranges of the Himalaya, the Main Himalaya, the Pangi Range, and the Dhauladhar, separating respectively the watersheds of the rivers Chenab, Ravi and Beas.

The town of Chamba derives its name from Champavati, a daughter of Raja Sahila Varman (920 A.D.). The ancient capital of the State was Brahmaur, earlier known as Brahmapura. Champavati happened to see the plateau on which the town now stands. A flat piece of land in the hills is indeed a rarity, and the Raja's daughter took a fancy to the site and asked her father to build a town upon it. But this piece of land had been earlier gifted to Brahmins, who were unwilling to part with it. Ultimately a deal was struck and the Raja agreed to give them eight copper coins in perpetuity on the occasion of every marriage in the family. On this condition the land was given, and the town was built and named Champa, after Champavati.

Next arose the question of water supply. A channel was made from a neighbouring stream, but the water would not enter. In those days the science of hydraulics was unknown and human sacrifices to propitiate the spirits of the water were common. Even to ensure the stability of forts, human beings were sacrificed and buried in the foundations as we have already mentioned in the account of Guler fort. To propitiate the spirit of this stream the Brahmins advised that the Rani or her son be sacrificed. Accompanied by her maidens, the Rani willingly mounted to the spot where the water-course joined the main stream. There a grave was dug and she was buried alive. It is said that once the grave was filled, the water began to flow, and since then Chamba has had an abundant supply. In memory of the Rani, a temple was erected and a fair called the Suhi Mela, which is attended only by women and children, is held there in the month of March. Dressed in their best clothes, the women climb the steps to the shrine and sing songs in the Rani's praise.

The temples of Chamba are noble specimens of mediaeval Hindu temple architecture. The temple of Vishnu, or Lakshminarayana, was built by Sahila Varman. The marble for the images was brought from the Vindhya mountains. Sahila Varman is still remembered by the people of Chamba. The latter part of his life he spent in retirement at Brahmaur, the ancient capital, in the company of his favourite teacher, Charpatnath.

Chamba district had a population of 2,10,579 in 1961 and an area of 8109.26 sq. km (3131 square miles). Chamba town, which is the district headquarters, had a population of 8,609 in the same year.

Like most hill capitals, Chamba has a large *maidan*. The town stands to the north of this and rises in a series of tiers. The most outstanding buildings are the palaces of the Raja. Of these the Rang Mahal, (Fig. 4) or 'Painted Palace,' which looks like a feudal castle, with towers at either side, is undoubtedly the most interesting. When J. C. French visited Chamba in 1931, he could not go inside, because a Rani was living there. There is one room whose walls are painted with murals depicting episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata Purana* in bright red and blue.

These mural paintings came to the notice of the first author in April 1960. The Cottage Industries Department of the Himachal Government had installed handlooms in the rooms and the murals were getting damaged. He moved the Archaeological Survey of India, who arranged to get them transferred to the National Museum of India where they can be seen in a good state of preservation.

Raj Singh (1714-1794) was one of the most renowned rulers of Chamba, and the rise of painting in the Guler-Chamba style was due to his patronage. He was born at the garden palace of Rajnagar in 1755, and was only nine years of age when he became Raja of Chamba. His early years were full of troubles, and taking advantage of his minority, as was the practice, his predatory neighbours, the Rajas of Kangra and Basohli, annexed portions of his territory. When he came of age Raj Singh retaliated. In 1782 he conquered Basohli. In 1794 Maharaja Sansar Chand of Kangra demanded from him the surrender of Rihlu, a fertile tract of land in the Kangra Valley. A battle took place at Nerti where Raj Singh was killed. While alive, Raj Singh's prayer to his family goddess Chamunda Devi was that he may die on the battlefield. His prayer was granted. At the spot where he fell a temple was erected by his son Jit Singh, where a fair is held every year on the anniversary of his death.



Fig. 5 *A portrait of Raja Raj Singh of Chamba*

There are a number of portraits of Raj Singh which indicate that he was a patron of art. In the portrait which we reproduce he is shown with a long beard smoking a hooka (Fig. 5). It must have been painted near about 1790. On the parapet wall a hawk is resting. Hunting quails, partridges and wild fowl with the aid of hawks was a familiar sport with the hill Rajas.

It was during the reign of Raj Singh that the Guler artist Nikka, the eldest son of the celebrated Nain Sukh, migrated to Chamba. He seems to have painted the famous Rukmini-Haran series of paintings which are partly in the collection of Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, and partly in the Punjab Museum, Chandigarh. We reproduce a painting from this series in which Krishna is shown eating rice brought by his friend Sudama (Plate XIX).

Now we deal with the legend of Krishna as the Yadava ruler of Dvaraka. He fights numerous demons, marries Rukmini, daughter of the king of Vidarbha. At Dvaraka, he leads a princely life in the company of his numerous wives. Sudama was a poor Brahmin who was Krishna's school mate. He was living in abject poverty in a dilapidated thatched hut, clad in rags. His wife advised him to seek the help of his friend Krishna, who was living in regal luxury at Dvaraka. As a gift for Krishna she tied a little rice in a piece of cloth. Carrying his humble present, Sudama arrived at Dvaraka. It is thus the *Prema Sagara* describes the city of Dvaraka : "All around the city is a very lofty rampart, in which are four gateways, in which are gold-inlaid and jewel-studded panels ; and within the city are glittering gold, silver and jewel-studded, five-storeyed and seven-storeyed palaces, so high that they conversed with the clouds, the spires and pinnacles of which are brilliant as lightning."*

Sudama ultimately reached the gilded, jewel-studded palace of Krishna. As soon as he entered the palace, Krishna descended from the throne, embraced him, and washed his feet. Washing of feet of a friend is regarded as a sign of affection and humility. Sudama was concealing his humble present, when Krishna noticed his embarrassment. Seizing the packet from under his arms, he avidly ate two handfuls of rice. When Sudama departed Krishna got a palace erected for him and made provision for his daily needs. The favourite convention of the Guler artists, viz., cypresses alternating with mangoes is evident to the right of the painting.

* F. Pincott, *The Prema Sagara* or Ocean of Love, p. 158



Plate XIX

Krishna eating rice brought as a gift by his friend Sudama.
(Chamba, about 1770, Chandigarh Museum)



Plate XX

Princess and the drummer boy.

(Chamba, about 1770, Chandigarh Museum)

Though Dhauladhar, the snow-covered mountain range, dominates the valleys of Kangra and Chamba it is seldom painted by the artists of the Punjab Hills. [A painting illustrating the romance of a low caste drummer boy and a Rajput princess was seen by J. C. French in the collection of Raja Raghunath Singh of Guler in 1929, and its photograph was published by him in his *Himalayan Paintings*. Now it is in Chandigarh Museum, and we reproduce it in colour (Plate XX). Though it was in the collection of the Rajas of Guler it is attributed to Chamba. In the upper half, the drummer boy is shown peeping at the princess bathing. She is screened by a curtain held by two maid-servants. On the right half is an empty bed indicating the elopement. To the right, she is shown eloping with the drummer boy, whose identity is left in no doubt as he is carrying a drum suspended from his neck. They were pursued by the king's archers who are dressed like gaddi shepherds of Chamba. The drummer boy and the princess were shot by the archers. This can be the only result of such a romance in the orthodox Punjab Himalaya where a strong caste prejudice still prevails and the honour of high caste women is jealously safeguarded.

After the demise of Raj Singh, patronage of painting was continued by his son and successor Jit Singh (1794-1808). His artists were Harkhu and Chhaju, sons of Nikka, who painted *Nayika* and *Baramasa* paintings of haunting beauty.

Jit Singh died in 1808, and his successor was a minor son Charhat Singh (1808-1844). Vigne, the English traveller met him in 1839. His brother Zorawar Singh and brother-in-law Bir Singh, the exiled Raja of Nurpur, were with him at that time. Vigne, who was also a portrait painter, thus records his impression of Charhat Singh :

“Cherut Singh, the Rajah of Chamba, is now, I should think, about forty-six years of age, for thirty of which he has been upon the *gaddi* (royal cushion). He is not tall, and is inclined to corpulency, with a full face, light complexion, good profile, and large eyes, a somewhat heavy expression, and a weak and drawling voice. Zurawur Singh is not so corpulent as his brother, with very handsome but inexpressive features, and was always splendidly dressed, *a la Sikh*, with a chelenk of rubies and emeralds worn on the forehead, over the turban. He allowed me to draw his profile, but pretended that he did not care about having it taken, and I could never persuade him to sit quiet. The Rajah was more complaisant; he sat like a statue, and was so pleased with his own likeness, that I was obliged to present it to him, and make another for myself. After I had succeeded tolerably with poor Bir

Singh, I handed the drawing to Cherut Singh for his inspection, who, upon seeing the long, melancholy face of his Quixote-looking brother-in-law portrayed upon paper, was wholly unable to check a disposition to laughter, and burst into a long-continued chuckle, in which all regard for Oriental gravity and decorum was quite forgotten.

“He passes his time very monotonously, devoting a great part of every morning to his *pūja*, or Hindu worship; then follows the breakfast; and then the long siesta. He then gives a short attention to business, and afterwards he and his brother ride up and down the green, upon an elephant, between two other, in the centre of a line of a dozen well-mounted horsemen. The Rajah is said to be a good man; but his subjects, as is generally the case in the East, are much robbed and oppressed by his superior officers. His Vuzir, Nutu, much celebrated throughout the country for his superior sagacity and wisdom, died about seven years ago, and was a great loss to his master.”*

The paintings of Charhat Singh period are dull and crude. It is an art which is no longer felt, hence decadent. The line is shaky and lacks the confidence, which the artists of the previous generation displayed in their masterly works. It appears an ageing art. There was a brief revival of painting during the rule of Sri Singh (1844-1871) by an artist Tara Singh who painted a *Ramayana* series. Tara Singh died in 1871 and with him the old art of miniature painting came to an end at Chamba.

* G. T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir and Ladakh*, Vol. I, p. 157

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